

MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA

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A report on a Plaster Cast Bust of the Life Mask of a tupuna named Tapua Te Whanoa, being Repatriated from Grassi Museum, Leipzig, Germany

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Summary

A plaster copy of a tūpuna Māori life cast will be repatriated from the Grassi Museum in Leipzig in June 2023. This paper sets out background information with a view to assisting with provenance. The cast is a male Māori, named Tapua Te Whanoa (also spelled Taupua Te Whanoa) of Ngāti Whakaue. The Grassi Museum accession register for no. 3704 has 'New Zealand' as provenance.

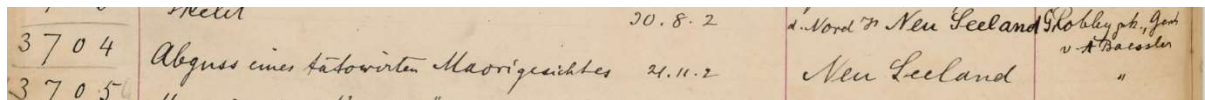


Figure 1 Grassi Museum accession register for 3704

Plaster Cast from a Life Mask (Grassi Museum ID - A 03704)



Figure 2 Grassi Museum copy of Tapua Te Whanoa's life mask

This cast was acquired in November 1902 and the catalogue entry reads: "G. Robley bought, gift from Ch v. A. Baessler.

The facing page of the main accession register has this handwritten entry:

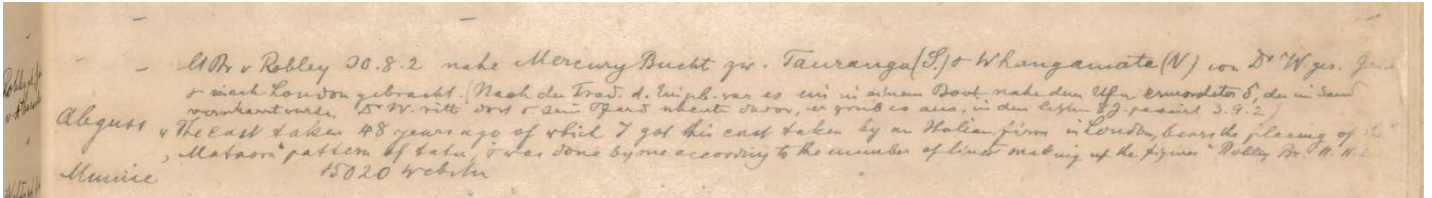


Figure 3 Grassi Museum accession register notes for 3704

The words in English in the entry above read: "The cast taken 48 years ago of which I got this cast taken by an Italian firm in London, bears the placing of the 'Mataoru' pattern of tatu, it was done by me according to the number of lines making up the figures."

Robley acquired numerous copies of life casts and used them to practice his moko designs, noting "they let me have cast and now I have life cast to make look real as I did see – colour and moko in its real place and measurements". One of these Robley copies is in the British Museum (BM Oc1854,1229.93) and is said (after confirmation from Paul Tapsell) to be the Ngāti Whakaue leader Taupua te Whanoa. The Museum curatorial comments note:

This life mask, cast in plaster and painted, depicts 'Taupua Te Whanoa' (Tapua), a noted chief and carver of Ngati Whakaue from the Rotorua region of New Zealand. In December 1849¹¹, he met with Governor Sir George Grey at Te Ngae and agreed to have an impression of his face taken. This mask is thought to be the original, although multiple copies exist in institutions around the world including in Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington.

The mask came to the British Museum as part of George Grey's extensive collections. The 'copies' were circulated by Horatio Robley, the notorious dealer and trader of Māori human remains and artefacts. Taupua Te Whanoa, was the son of Te Whanoa and descendant of Pukaki of Ngati Whakaue [information supplied by Paul Tapsell, 1996].



Figure 4 British Museum copy of Te Whanoa's life mask Oc1854,1229.93

¹¹ A National Library reference states that the life mask was made by Sir George Grey in 1854 <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22416562>



A life mask of Tapua Te Whanoa is also at Te Papa (above left) and the Pitt Rivers Museum (above right) and the Wellcome Museum (following page). The Pitt Rivers entry reads:

This painted mask is a likeness of Māori chief Tapua Te Whanoa of the Ngati Whakaue *hapu* of the Rotorua region. The plaster has been etched with a full facial *moko* presumably in imitation of the chief's actual tattoos. The lines have been coloured black (possibly with liquid charcoal) and then sealed with varnish. An identical mask is held at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongawera at Wellington, made in 1854 for Sir George Grey, Governor of New Zealand. The Wellington mask is probably the original cast (done from life) from which this replica was later made.

A comparison with the Leipzig copy (to the right) certainly indicates that the mask is also of Whanoa.





Figure 5 Wellcome Science Museum copy of Tapua Te Whanoa's life cast

Making Life Casts

Physical anthropology and a fascination with phrenology developed in the second part of the nineteenth century. Body measuring and typology gradually gave way to an interest in studying facial expressions in an attempt to categorise humanity. Photography and plaster casts became a new discipline and a highly sought after museum object for exchange and purchase.

In a 2015 paper (Sysling, 2015) notes:

In France the casting of faces was introduced into physical anthropology at about the same time as photography: between 1837 and 1840 the French physician on board of the expeditions of Jules Dumont D'Urville made about fifty casts in the Pacific. Paul Broca recommended the making of casts in his 1879 *Instructions générales* and other anthropologists and manuals followed. In Germany, according to Andrew Zimmermann, it was naturalist traveller Hermann von Schlagintweit who pioneered the technique in the 1870s. Otto Finsch became the most enthusiastic German anthropological plaster caster and sold his casts all over Europe in the 1880s.

In his visits to New Zealand in 1824 and 1840 the botanist and cartographer Jules Dumont D'Urville oversaw the making of life casts by the anatomist and phrenologist Pierre Dumoutier, which are now in collections throughout Europe including the Musée d'homme collection in Paris. Four of the Māori casts featured in the stunning work by Fiona Pardington (*Ahua: a Beautiful Hesitation*) and the book *Fiona Pardington: The Pressure of Sunlight Falling*, 2010.

Sysling explains, in detail, the method of making the casts:

In a manual for scientific travellers, Serrurier (1891) gave detailed instructions. For a face about one and a half kilos of burnt plaster was needed. Before application it was to be mixed with (hot) water and stirred 'like you would an egg' until it was smooth. To prevent a painful burning sensation on the skin when the plaster was taken off, faces, hands and hair were rubbed with oil. Goose quills were to be put in the nose so that the subject could breathe. Then the plaster was applied, set and removed. For the person subjected to the treatment, the plaster sometimes felt hot but not painful, according to Serrurier.

In his academic work on Nias, Kleiweg (1914) described the procedure he followed to make the casts. He and his assistant each first greased hair, eyebrows and beards, but not the face because this would make facial furrows less visible in the plaster. Ideally, Kleiweg wrote, they cut a person's hair short, but in practice only very few allowed them to do that. After cutting the hair, they put the subject on his back on the floor with his head on a pillow and applied plaster to the face. The faster they worked the less plaster dripped into the hair. Kleiweg emphasised that he had been careful to keep the nose holes free from plaster so breathing was possible. Taking off the plaster was the most difficult part of the operation and needed to be done slowly and carefully.

References

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Information below compiled by Dr Te Herekiele Herewini

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Repatriation of six life casts from Germany in June 2023 and September 2023.

In mid-2019, the State of Saxony in Germany via the Grassi Museum, Leipzig, agreed through a memorandum of understanding to return six life casts of Māori ancestors, alongside Māori and Moriori ancestral remains housed in their ethnographic collections.

Four of these ancestral casts were repatriated in June 2023, namely Ngapaki Te :Puni (Te Ātiawa), Oriwia Ātiraukawa (Te Ātiawa), Wineera Te Kanae (Ngāti Toarangatira) and Taupua Te Whanoa (Ngāti Whakaue, Te Arawa).

In September 2023, the life casts of 'Takatahara' and 'Heroua' were uplifted by representatives of Ngāi Tahu from Germany.

Importantly as part of this repatriation process all the life casts above were returned to the care of their respective uri (descendants).